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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000115

SIPDIS

State pass to USTR EBRYAN
UADOC for 6500 and 4431/MAC/AP/OPB/VLC/HPPHO

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SUBJECT: ACROBATS, BEER BELLIES AND FLOATS - VIETNAM HONORS
TRADEMARKS

1. Although counterfeit and pirated goods are readily available virtually everywhere in Vietnam, government and business is more and more realizing the importance and value of brands and trademarks. On January 30, Ho Chi Minh City organized a "Festival Honoring Vietnamese Trademarks" which was hosted by the Chairman of the HCMC People's Committee and broadcast on primetime television. The Festival was a parade of 34 floats representing some of the country's most famous trademarks. Several firms were given awards. "This is the way in which we express our gratitude to the businesses which have made contributions to the city and the nation," remarked Chairman Le Thanh Hai in his opening speech.

2. Thousands of people - some ringers for the companies participating - lined the parade route and clapped and cheered. Floats represented companies such as Trung Nguyen Coffee, whose minivan fit inside an enormous sculpted elephant led by a team of ethnic minority acrobats. Agifish, a large seafood company, was represented by a giant basa fish. Saigon Beer impressed everyone with truth in advertising -- their float was preceded by a smiling man with an artificially-padded beer belly. It was not just bellies that were big - Viet Tien garments had a group of marching giant shirts, complete with giant Viet Tien labels. Bitis, a local shoe company, had, of course, a giant shoe. The audience was also treated to a giant wrench, an enormous pencil, and a vehicle-sized t-pot (from Minh Long I). The most unusual float, however, was a huge pair of toenail clippers from Nghia Nippers. Private and state-owned companies participated, and Kyndan Co. hedged its bet by erecting a large hammer and sickle atop its float that was largely dedicated to foam - its primary product. After giant toenail clippers, the traditional dragon dances, marching fashion models, and ethnic drummers gave a more traditional feel to some of the entries.

3. The event could not have been mistaken for the Rose Bowl Parade, but the crowds had an enormous amount of fun. So, evidently, did the CEOs of some of the participating companies. The Chairman of Dapha, a private bottled-water company, personally directed his company's float along the parade route. Dressed entirely in black, he paced his employees through their dance routine and gave the order to launch the balloons at just the right moment.

4. Crowd control was a bit crude, however. A couple of blocks beyond the main reviewing stand, police were having difficulty moving crowds back from the parade route. In an isolated incident, the police simply got out their electric cattle prods, which after a few applications, quickly cleared the route.

5. Comment: This parade did not make international headlines, but it did serve to remind that the HCMC government recognizes the important role that business plays in the city's development. It was a beginner's attempt to popularize the concept of trademark protection (all of the floats featured "Quality crafted with pride in Vietnam" seals of approval). The ceremony and parade also illustrated that Vietnamese government, business, and consumers are becoming more brand conscious and are aware of the value of protecting brands and trademarks. It is a long way from a trademark parade to pro-active IPR protection for local and foreign rights holders, but HCMC has made this first official "populist" effort to educate its residents.

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